DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 818 SO 018 267

AUTHOR Smith, Peggy A.; Smith, Alan D.
TITLE Women in Politics: Some Historical and Cultural Aspects of Voting Patterns and Possible Influences on Education.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Elections; *Females; Higher Education; Political Affiliation; Political Attitudes; Political Campaigns; *Political Power; Political Socialization; *Politics of Education; Secondary Education; Social Science Research; *Voting; Voting Rights; *Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

The early and formative years of women's involvement in the political structure of the United States was filled with high hopes, especially issues related to women and children. Educational reform was one of the major goals that women hoped to achieve. As demonstrated by an in-depth look at the 1920 National Convention of the Republican Party, many women who became involved in the early moral and political movements found it difficult to simultaneously accept their responsibility for the protection of moral values in society and to recognize their own limited power to seek social change. Although women have come a long way in achieving some level of equality with men, there are still significant cultural barriers preventing equal political power to women. Recent trends in voting have many people pointing to a "gender gap" of voting preference among women versus men. However, any trend is probably not due to perceived differences between the sexes, but more related to the diversity of educational, racial, ethnic, religious, regional, and financial issues that divide the women's political movement. (BZ)

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WOMEN IN POLITICS: SOME HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF VOTING PATTERNS AND POSSIBLE INFLUENCES ON EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The early and formative years of women's involvement in the political structure of the United States was filled with high hopes, especially concerning women and children. Educational reform was one of the major issues, if not the primary one, that women hoped to gain political leaverage in accomplishing women's desires in society. As demonstrated by an in-depth look at the National Convention of the Republican Party, many women who became involved in the early moral and political movements found it difficult to simultaneously accept their responsibility for the protection of moral values in society and to recognize their own limited power to seek social change. The Convention represents an acid test or proving ground for women in applying their political power. The basic planks that women fought for at the Convention centered around six major issues. Unfortunately, many factors at the Convention were disappointing and disillusioning. The two major planks at the Convention, concerning maternity and education, were refused. The failure of women to make a permanent political platform severely hurt women's influence on educational issues in the early years after suffrage.

Although women have come a long way in achieving some level of equality with men, there are still significant cultural barriers preventing equal political power to women. Assumptions concerning women's voting patterns have led to erroneous conclusions about the solidarity of the female vote. Politicians soon after passage of the Suffrage Act realized that: many women simply did not vote, probably because of their lack of political education and awareness; women did not vote collectively on issues that focused on social reform; and their voting patterns were remarkably similar to those of their husbands. Recent trends in voting have many people pointed to a "gender gap" or voting preference among women versus men. However, probably any trend is not due to perceived differences between the sexes, but more related to the diversity of educational, racial, ethnic, religious, regional, and financial issues that deeply divide the women's political movement.

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EARLY POLITICS OF WOMEN AND POSSIBLE INFLUENCES ON EDUCATION: THE SUFFRAGE ACT

Introduction

The early and formative years of women's involvement in the political structure of the United States was filled with high hopes, especially concerning the welfare of women and children. Educational reform was one of the major issues, if not the primary one, that women hoped to gain political leaverage in accomplishing women's desires in society. The purpose of this paper is to inspect the formative years before passage of the Suffrage Act in 1920, and the political experiences that women gained in developing their corresponding political associations. The National Convention of the Republican Party was chosen as a vehicle to investigate the early politics and possible influences on education by women.

Prior to the Suffrage Act

Prior to the Suffrage Act, especially from the period 1830 to 1860 women frequently defined their public roles in terms of the moral values they were charged to uphold. According to Harris (1981), "Christian duty led them to appeal to men on behalf of the unfortunate. They used persuasion, not force; appeals to paternalist protection, not threats. As a group, they were extraordinarily effective" (p. 105). Unfortunately, according to Scott and Tilly (1980) and Humphries (1980), many women who became involved in the early moral and political movements found it difficult to simultaneously accept their responsibility for the protection of moral values in society and to recognize their own limited power to seek social change. In fact, "The relentless illogic

of their circumstances forced large numbers of women from the cradle of moral reform into the armies of the women's rights movement" (Harris, p. 107).

However, as the civil war ended and the rapid urbanization that followed the war began, the limited concept of women's ability to influence the world dramatically changed. As with any war effort, large numbers of women organized themselves into auxiliary units. Generally, these women were from respectable families and shared a common mission to help the men defend the country (Humphries, 1980). As continuing reform in perceived women's roles in society changed, some women insisted on acquiring an education. In fact, a steady stream of daughters from affluent and middle-class families was sent to the increasing numbers of coeducational universities and colleges for women that opened in the 1870s and 1880s. According to Harris (1981), "These women demanded, and got, challenging educations" (p. 109). However, in a double-standard society, graduation of women brought its own discontent. Traditionally, many women considered themselves unfit for marriage, or at least not suited for the roles that women held in this time period. In fact, statistics show that more than 75 percent of the generation of women who graduated before 1900 remained unmarried (Mincer, 1980, Vanek, 1980).

Since many college-educated women remained single, other outlets for their creativity and energy was needed. Unfortunately, there were few options that educated women could follow to professionally advance themselves (Katz, 1971a, 1971b). Some went into the few medical schools for women or struggled head-on with the exclusionary policies of the traditional, established colleges (Katz, 1971a). Most women, however, moved into the field of teaching (Tyack, 1974).

As educational opportunities improved for women, coupled with women's desire to "exercise their naturally received guardianship over virtue in an active, national area" (Harris, 1981, p. 113), the feminist movement developed strongly. Thousands of women organized themselves in charity organizations and other social functions in order to exert their moral influence on social problems. Lack of educational opportunities, family instability, crime, prostitution, poverty, physical abuse, child neglect, and social issues were platforms for women's actions to change. Many women contended that the basic root of these problems stemmed from the abuse of alcohol. Hence, many of the large feminist movements centered around the education of people of the sins of alcohol, and its influence on family instability. However, this fixation on alcohol was but a mask on the growing sense of collective feminine values as an active force in achieving change in society.

The New Politics

The feminist movement peaked in power during the period prior to the Suffrage Act. Many women's magazines advocated the "New Politics" and the potential political powers that women could possess. "Millions for hogs, but not one cent for babies! That is the way it has sounded to women all these years, women, knocking gently at legislative gates with petitions, resolution, and indirect influence" (Stewart, 1920). Women perceived their role in education and society as a direct and humane one. As suggested by Stewart women coming into political power wanted straight-forward solutions to age-old problems.

> Woman's knowledge derives from experience rather than from investigation. In consequence, conservation of <u>things</u> seems more important to her than conservation of <u>opinions about things</u>. The theory of state's rights versus that of federal control is incidental to saving the lives of babies and stopping child labor. The point is to get the thing

> done. If precedent interferes with action, why not make a new precedent? Red tape has no sacred taboo for her. Where the modern Alexander falters, Alexandria cuts the Gordian knot and serenely marches on to the conquest of good government. On her way to facts she sometimes walks straight through theories because she doesn't know they are there. (p. 49).

Hence, women perceived the passage of the Suffrage Act in 1920 as the coming of a new era of politics, in which women can come to political power in a courageous manner for the benefit of good government and improved social services (Toombs, 1920). The hopes for this new political power was far reaching in many minds of both men and women. As stated by Stewart, concerning the general feeling on government that was commonly held by the feminist movement, "Promoting the general welfare can never be an incidental object of a just government. Rather must it be a direct aim, which, rightly served, is all-inclusive" (p. 147). Hence, most high expectations of women were encountered with the first attempt of women voters to shape a party platform at the Republican National Convention in 1920 (Frazer, 1920; Stewart, 1920b).

The Republican National Convention of 1920

The Convention was held months before election day, in which Suffrage became legal in all states. The convention represented an acid test or proving ground for women in applying their political power in influencing government policy in the social services area, especially education and women's rights. The women at the convention were, as suggested by Frazer (1920), who was a reporter at the convention, "were not the ordinary untrained, undisciplined rank and file of voters, unaccustomed to think, to organize, to act" (p. 26). The impression given by Frazer was that "These women, it was plain, knew what they wanted; they knew what the women they represented wanted; and they knew exactly how to set about accomplishing their desires" (p. 26). The basic planks or issues that

women wanted in this new political structure are several. The unfinished business of the passage of suffrage and continuation of federal prohibition was certainly on the minds of the women at the convention, but those issues were given as almost certainities. Most of their efforts concentrated on obtaining an adequate representation on the natioral committees of the Republican Party, which managed the politics and political campaigns. As noted by Stewart (1920b) and Frazer (1920), adequate representation did not imply equality, since not all women of the nation at this time had the voting priviledge, and many women needed education in politics.

The six essential planks that women initially wanted to incorporate into the national platform were designed to "express the ideas of the new woman element of the electorate. Naturally, they deal chiefly with the welfare of women and children" (Frazer, 1920, p. 156). The planks provided for independent naturalization of married women, suffrage, rigid enforcement of a federal child-labor law, protection of women in industry, protection of infant life through a federal program of maternity and care of infants, and a federal department of education with a women head who would virtually be a member of the President's cabinet (Frazer, 1920; Stewart, 1920b). Unfortunately, despite good intentions, many factors at the Convention were disappointing and disillusioning. But, as Frazer suggested about the dark side of the Convention, "those factors were not the women. The women were a gallant success" (p. 25); indicating that the problems or barriers in the new politics were inability of their male counterparts in accepting women into the political structure.

Eventually at the Convention, four relatively unimportant planks were accepted. The last two, relating to maternity and education, were refused. These two issues were probably the most important and far-reaching of all the major issues that women pushed. However, the optimism that most women had was

still high, as stated by Frazer (1920), when she wrote, "this leaves the Republican women something worthwhile to fight for in 1924!" (p. 156).

The failure of women to make a permanent political platform severely hurt women's influence on educational issues in the early years after suffrage (Benson, 1984). The major educational reforms that did occur certainly were not the result of the women's movement alone. Education was a primary issue of the early women's movement, since it was so intimately involved in the total welfare of women and children. As stated by Ms. Preston of the National Education Association from the state of Washington at the Convention:

> Education is the biggest single proposition before the American nation today. It's so big, so serious, that we don't dare ignore it any longer for fear of what may arrive. In this whole question the West is unquestionably more alive, more alert, than the East. Their standards are higher. And, personally, I believe it is the West which will force the East to rouse to the gravity of the situation and make education the big, live political issue which it should be. (Frazer, 1920, p. 158).

Education, along with women's political freedom as well as other freedoms, is intrinsic in theory of popular government. With the passage of the Suffrage Act, "Half the human race has at last won its right to entry. For the first time in the United States the whole human family constitutes a recognized and responsible citizenship" (Stewart, 1920b, p. 60). Yet, with 27 million women with the right to vote, 10 million of which are new to the voting priviledge, it could not effectively press its educational demands in the early years of the new politics.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, the dreams of political power that was thought by women to come with the right to vote never matched the expectations of the feminists who fought so hard to promote the Suffrage Act. The ability to influence the mainstream of this country's political and social directions, especially in the field of education, was minimum in its effectiveness. The united women's front

that helped to break the chains of political inequality in the passing of suffrage could not sustain its forming into a viable political drive that was recognized during this time period. It appears that, although voting priviledges were won, a resultant change in women's life style and political awareness did not change accordingly to take sufficient advantage of the new priviledge in obtaining the desired educational reforms.

WOMEN IN POLITICS: CULTURAL ASPECTS OF MODERN VOTING PATTERNS

Introduction

Many historians have generally described the period of the 1920s as a time of the establishment of equal treatment for women in politics, economics, and in the home. However, a closer review of the period indicates that the basic status of women has remained unchanged to a large extent. Despite the suffragists' predictions of the 1920s, women voters have essentially failed to act as a block at the polls. In fact, women in general have failed to generate much in the way of political solidarity and, hence, failed to exert an independent influence on politics. The purpose of this short paper is to examine the current trends in women's voting patterns and possible cultural influences that this lack of political solidarity or gender gap has on society.

Assumptions toward Political Solidarity

Although women have come a long way in achieving some level of equality with men since the early feminist movement before passage of the Suffrage Act, there are still significant cultural barriers preventing equal political power to women (Chafe, 1972; Dixon, 1980, Friedrich, 1984; Elshtain, 1984a, 1984b).

political power to women (Chafe, 1972; Dixon, 1980, Friedrich, 1984; Elshtain, 1984a, 1984b). Initially, it was hoped by the suffragists, because women appeared to be so different from men in many viewpoints, that once women had the right to vote, the entire political system would be transformed. The images that women are essentially pure in spirit, selfless in motivations, and dedicated to the preservation of human life made it appear that female voters would remake society and turn government away from war and corruption (Boles, 1979; Chafe, 1972). However, a lot of assumptions were made in forming such an opinion. First, of course, the assumption of the purity of the female spirit may be questionable. Personally, it is the writer's experience after reading relatively large volumes of material on the political activities of women, that their spirit is no more pure than that of their male counterpart. Women have been treated more as an object to look at and possess, rather than equal in making decisions that affect the economical, political, and cultural aspects of modern society. Hence, because women have been treated separately, many people, including other women, assumed women behaved essentially the same. Women were considered not to have individual preferences and conceptions of right-or-wrong; women were thought to have only the goals of a perfect and caring society. The danger in these assumptions is, like grouping the opinions of ethnic populations together, that a stereotyped and predictable voting pattern would result. Examples of this mentality in political thinking still exists in modern society, such as the "black power," "student vote," and the "farming community." Many people still assume that members of these separate subpopulations in this country vote in homogenous and predictable fashion. Although there is some element of truth in this proposition, recent voting patterns of these gourps have not always been consistent nor predictable.

The next major assumption in the grand scheme of exerting political change in modern society by women was the ability to collectively organize into a cohesive unit (Patrick, 1944; Dixon, 1980; Kauffman, 1984). As suggested by Chafe (1972), "The deed was more difficult than the premise, however, for if women were to fulfill the expectations of female leaders they had to vote together, organize on the basis of sex, and demonstrate a collective allegiance to common ideals and programs" (p. 25-26). Thus, the validity of the suffragists" claims ultimately turned on the question or ideal of whether women could create a political block or solidarity in the electorate. This block would then be characterized by the commitment to a distinctive set of interests and values (Figure 1).

Many politicians, as suggested by Friedrich (1984), were naturally terrified at the prospect of runaway reform, assuming that the validity of women solidarity was correct. In fact, to win the new voters' support in 1920, Congress quickly appropriated 1.25 million dollars for health education for children and mothers. The states of Michigan and Montana passed equal-pay laws by 1921, and by the same year about 20 states had granted women the right to serve on juries. However, as suggested by Friedrich (1984) and Chafe (1972), politicians soon discovered a few trends of so-called women solidarity. In general, many women simply did not vote, probably because of their lack of education and awareness in the political arena; women did not vote collectively on issues that focused on social reform; and their voting patterns were remarkable similar to those of their husbands.

Figure 1 - Women's attempt at political solidarity in the Republican Convention of 1920 was blocked on the most important planks in formulating the Party's platform. (Adapted from Frazer, 1920, p. 25-26)

The Gender Gap

This lack of a gender gap between men and women, a term referred to by Elshtain (1984a, 1984b), relates to this apparent lack of cohesiveness in political activity and reform that was evident soon after women attained voting rights. Even to modern voting patterns, women were found to vote like other men, not like other women. In fact, as suggested by Elshtain, the 1980 Presidential election was the first election since suffrage to show significantly different voting patterns between men and women. Women's votes in the 1980 election largely remained the same and followed party lines; for example, women voted approximately 45 percent for Jimmy Carter and 47 percent for Ronald Reagan (p. 22). Surprisingly, it was men who showed a significant shift across party lines toward Reagan, male defections from Carter left him with 36 percent of the vote, while Reagan won 55 percent of the vote. Thus, this change in men and women, in terms of voting patterns, represented the first major evidence of a formation of a gender gap. However, as suggested by Elshtain, inevitably it focuses on the attitudes of women, namely a lack of confidential, rather than a cohesive effort of women to make a statement for political reform.

The factors involved in this recent change in voting patterns or gender gap are more related to the issues that the candidates represent. For example, as mentioned by Dixon (1980) and Elshtain (1984a), on issues usually cited as explicitly feminist, there is little difference in the reported opinions of both sexes. In fact, as discussed by Elshtain (1984b), the current polls illustrate that slightly more men than women favor abortion rights; and, since the beginning of surveys on abortion, the gap between the sexes on abortion has narrowed. The notion that women are

distinctly different than men is not the question therefore, but the complexity of the issues involved, regardless of gender. The universal class concept of women's political movement or solidarity is shattered, not by gender differences, but by the diversity of educational, racial, ethnic, religious, regional, and financial issues. "The matters that divide us are too important, and run too deep" (Elshtain, 1984b, p. 32).

Conclusion

The lack of solidarity and a distinctive gender gap may well have caused the trend that, although the proportion of women in this country's population is over 50 percent, they still hold less than five percent of the elected political positions (Friedrich, 1984). More than just attitudes are at work here. Women have traditionally given up their role in the political machinery to men, and the lack of politically solidarity among women's voting patterns has not helped to change the present situation.

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